

# Olu brings his own experiences to music

contributed story

for The Portland Observer

Captivating. Inspiring. Insightful. Soulful. These are among the multitude of adjectives that come to mind when one experiences the sheer magic of 25-year-old Harlem born singer/songwriter/musician Olu's debut LP Soul Catcher. Filled with songs of introspection and meditation on the totality of the human condition, Soul Catcher is a stunning collection of original material that weaves diverse musical elements such as jazz, r&b, blues, hip-hop and world beat music into a wonderful aural tapestry that touches the heart and soul.

Olu's concerns with social issues grow out of his deep-seated quest for spiritual solace in a fast-paced, increasingly hi-tech world that has forgotten to be mindful of the creator. To remain mindful of the spiritual path, Olu divides his time between his Harlem home and his cabin in the Catskill Mountains, where he finds the spiritual insight to continue his journey through this phase called life.

But as humble and soft-spoken as Olu is, he is certainly not shy about

using his music to address social issues confronting humanity. One example is the first single "Baby Can't Leave It Alone," a soul-stirring tune about a beautiful young girl going through the painful agony of an addiction. Augmented by a crisp guitar lick and rich melody, "Baby Can't Leave It Alone" has lyrics that are crafted to appeal to anyone who has had a bout with a bad habit that they can't seem to shake - ("I know it seems there's no way out, but ask yourself a question before you score. Will I raise a child who's free from doubt, or will I be resting forever more?") - and falls in the tradition of soul master Curtis Mayfield's classics "Stone Junkie" or "Superfly."

Olu was later selected as member of the world-renowned Boys Choir of Harlem, touring Japan and the Far East. As a young adult, Olu has played in several bands playing everything from jazz to rock. A history of close calls with record deals all changed when a chance meeting at the gym where he studied Lama Kung Fu led him to Stuart Matthewman, a member of the Sade and Sweetback bands. After devel-

oping a casual friendship with the co-writer/producer of both Maxwell albums, Matthewman discovered that Olu was a musician and took his tape to Gee Street's president Jon Baker, landing him a deal. Soul Catcher takes its name from the healing instrument used by Native American shamans to remove negative spirits believed to cause illness (both mental and physical) in a person. Likewise for Olu, whose family heritage includes Seminole as well as African-American book, the title Soul Catcher becomes a metaphor for what he hopes his music will do to his listeners and his world. In many ways, Olu is a modern day healer soothing the aching souls of a society hooked on violence, hate, and materialism. "I think that the world is sick and that music can be used as a shaman's tool, because that's originally what it was. It was used ceremoniously and for communicating ideas to people who are right there with you, and sometimes to and from people who are dead. If I can do my little part to help make people feel better, then so be it."



Photo by Kate Swan

## Natalie Cole releases new christmas album

CONTRIBUTED STORY

FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

On *The Magic of Christmas*, Natalie Cole brings a new elegance to more Christmas favorites, with the same brilliant orchestration that made *Holly And Ivy* a perennial Christmas best seller - this time with the symphonic flair of the world-renowned London Symphony Orchestra.

Highlights include a breathtaking "O Tannenbaum", a sweet

"Christmas Waltz", a swinging "Twelve Days of Christmas" and the classic "The Christmas Song" performed by Natalie with her father, Nat "King" Cole.

Recognized for delivering a lyric with uncompromising intensity, Natalie grew up "loving the classic performances," no matter the genre. Her early appreciation for Ella Fitzgerald, Sara Vaughn and all of her father's contemporaries soon translated into a curiosity about art-

ists such as the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones. That curiosity continues today.

"I think Lauryn Hill is carrying on that tradition of excellence," she says, when asked to remark on any new standard-bearers.

"She always makes a point in her concerts and interviews to talk about what's come before and how important it is to our entire musical legacy."

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